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GEOGRAPHIC MEMORANDUM

GEOGRAPHIC BRIEF OF ECONOMIC REGION V -- THE TRANSCAUCASUS

CIA/RR G/I 59-19
10 March 1959

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Research and Reports

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W A R N I N G

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GEOGRAPHIC BRIEF OF ECONOMIC REGION V -- THE TRANSCAUCASUS

The three small republics which compose Economic Region V lie between the high ridge of the Great Caucasus Mountains and the boundary that separates the Soviet Union from Turkey and Iran. The Black and Caspian Seas form the western and eastern boundaries of the region, respectively. The total area of the Transcaucasus is 71,853 square miles. Of this Azerbaijan, the largest of the three republics, occupies 33,436 square miles; Armenia, the smallest, 11,506 square miles; and Georgia, 26,911 square miles. The physical geography of the region is highly varied, including humid subtropical lowlands, dry lowland steppes, high arid plateau lands, and rugged mountains and foothills. The cultural and economic geography of the region reflect this diversity. The population is extremely unevenly distributed and is made up of a large number of nationality groups. An agricultural economy prevails over much of the lowland and foothill areas of Transcaucasia. In the highlands and in the Baku area, extractive industries are important; and manufacturing industries are developing in the main urban centers of the region.

The northern boundary of the Transcaucasus runs in general along the crest of the Great Caucasus Range, which stretches some 700 miles from the northwest to the southeast across the isthmus between the Black and Caspian Seas (see hypsometric map of the Caucasus). Several peaks along the crest are more than 15,000 feet in elevation, and extensive



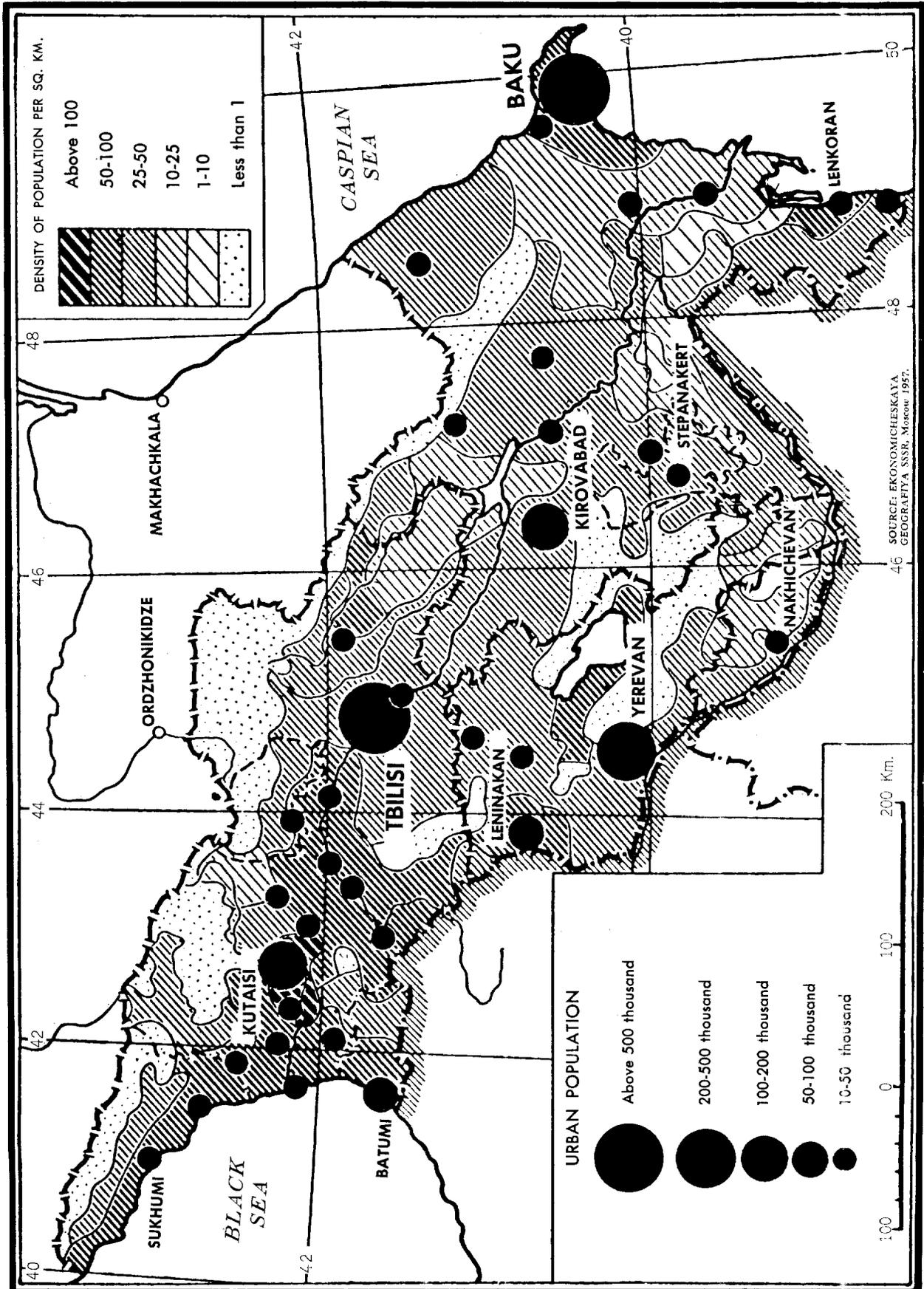
areas are glacier covered. In a 25- to 50-mile belt paralleling the crest of the mountains on the south, rugged terrain predominates. The numerous rapid streams that flow out from the mountains cut the south face of the Caucasus Range into a series of ridges and deep valleys with a north-northeast--south-southwest orientation, thus making transportation or communication parallel to the Caucasus Range extremely difficult. South of the mountain belt are two valleys -- the Rion Lowland fronting on the Black Sea and the Kura Lowland facing the Caspian. Both lowlands are roughly triangular in shape, narrowing as they reach inland, and both terminate in the relatively low Suramskiy Range which separates them. The Suramskiy Range connects the Great Caucasus Mountains with the Little Caucasus Mountains and the Armenian highland, an arid, rocky tableland between 4,000 and 7,000 feet in elevation.

The southern slopes of the Caucasus Range have a fairly dense forest cover of juniper, oak, and hornbeam up to an elevation of about 6,500 feet in the west. Toward the east the forest cover thins out markedly. Alpine meadows occupy the belt between the tree line and the snow line, which lies between 10,000 and 12,000 feet. In the lowlands and foothills, much of the natural vegetation has been cleared to permit use of the land for agriculture. Limited areas of humid subtropical forest with dense undergrowth, however, still remain in the Rion Lowland, notably around the extensive swamps near the coast. Natural vegetation in the Kura Lowland is semidesert in character, consisting mainly of low bushes and grasses. In the Little Caucasus Mountains, scattered

deciduous forests occupy the lower slopes; but low bushes and grasses predominate at higher elevations and on the Armenian Plateau.

The climate of Transcaucasia is generally mild. The main range of the Caucasus shelters the region from cold northern winds, and the Black and Caspian Seas exert a moderating influence. Precipitation decreases from west to east. The Black Sea coast has a humid subtropical climate. Winters are mild, with January temperatures averaging from 43°F to 45°F; summers are hot and humid, with heavy rainfall, ranging up to about 100 inches a year in the Batumi area. In the Kura Lowland east of the Suramskiy Range the climate is more continental in character. Winters are relatively warm, but temperatures are lower than in the west and frosts occur occasionally; summers are very hot and dry. Precipitation is light, amounting to less than 8 inches a year immediately southwest of Baku. In a limited area on the Caspian coast around Lenkoran' the climate is humid subtropical, with precipitation increasing to an average of 65 inches a year. At the higher elevation of the Armenian Plateau in the south, winters are considerably colder; and January temperatures average from 14°F to 20°F.

Between 9 and 10 million people live in the Transcaucasus Region -- about 4.2 million in Georgia, 3.7 million in Azerbaydzhan, and 1.8 million in Armenia. Population density varies greatly throughout the region, being noticeably affected by differences in both relief and precipitation (see Map 27623). In the Rion Valley around Kutaisi the density is over 250 per square mile, whereas extensive areas on the Armenian highland and in the Caucasus Mountains are virtually uninhabited.



POPULATION DENSITY IN THE TRANSCAUCASUS

27623 4-59

Throughout the Rion Valley, on the slopes of the surrounding uplands, and along the Black Sea coast, the densities are high -- generally over 150 per square mile. Population decreases from west to east, as does the precipitation, whereas in the arid Kura Lowland adjacent to the Caspian Sea the population density reaches 150 in only a few isolated areas.

Over 40 percent of the population of the Transcaucasus is classified as urban. Baku, capital of the Azerbaydzhan Republic and the center of the oil industry, is by far the largest urban area of the region. It is the fourth largest city in the Soviet Union, having a population of 901,000 in the city proper and the suburbs that are administratively subordinate to it. The capital of the Georgian Republic, Tbilisi, is the second largest urban center of the Transcaucasus, with 635,000 inhabitants. It is the most important transportation hub in the region and an expanding industrial center. Yerevan, the capital of the Armenian Republic, ranks third, with a population of 385,000. Only 3 other cities have over 100,000 inhabitants: Kutaisi (114,000), Kirovabad (111,000), and Leninakan (103,000).

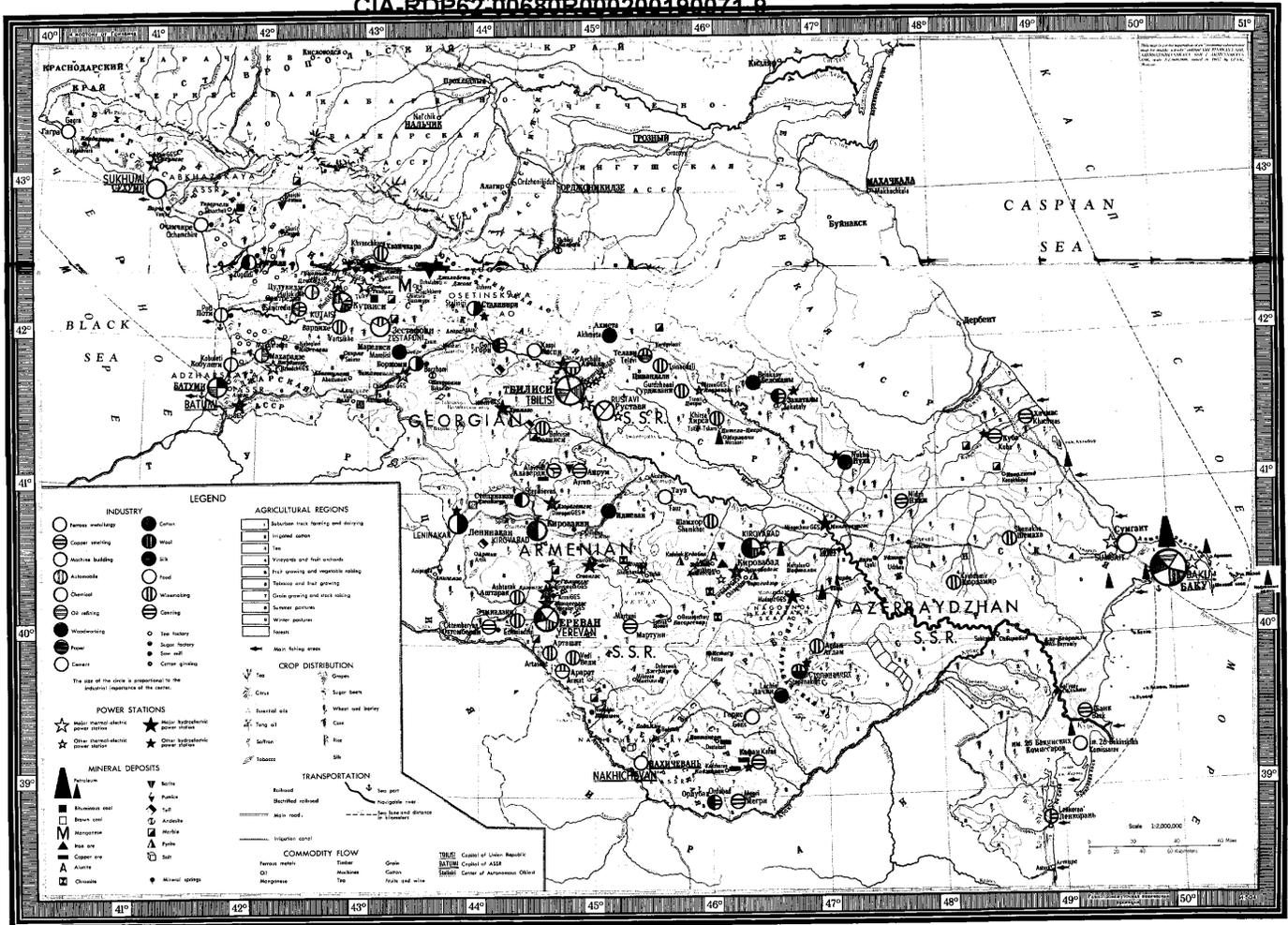
The Transcaucasus contains a large number of nationality groups, some of which have been given official status through the establishment of separate administrative units in the areas where they predominate. The ethnic composition of the three union republics, estimated by percent, is as follows:

| <u>Republic</u> | <u>Armenian</u> | <u>Azerbaijdzhan</u> | <u>Georgian</u> | <u>Russian</u> | <u>Other</u> |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Armenia | 80 | -- | -- | 10 | 10 |
| Azerbaijdzhan | 10 | 60 | -- | 20 | 10 |
| Georgia | 10 | -- | 60 | 10 | 20 |

Lesser nationality groups are subordinate to the union republics. In Georgia the Abkhaz inhabit the northwest corner of the republic and the Adzhars the southwest corner. Both have autonomous republic (ASSR) status. The Southern Ossetians on the south slopes of the Caucasus mountains in north-central Georgia have autonomous oblast (AO) status. Two nationality units are subordinate to Azerbaijan. The Nagorno-Karabakhskaya AO is inhabited predominantly by Armenians. The Nakhichevanskaya ASSR is a predominantly Azerbaijdzhan area, but it is separated from Azerbaijan proper by the southeast extension of Armenia. Other small nationality groups in the Transcaucasus include Kurds, Talysh, Svans, and Pshavs. The Russians in the Transcaucasus area are scattered among the industrial centers, where they serve as administrative officials and technicians.

Extractive industries are of primary importance in the Transcaucasus, although manufacturing industries based on local resources have gained significance in recent years (see Map 27624). Oil from the Baku area is the region's chief contribution to the Soviet economy, although as an oil producing area the Baku area has recently fallen behind the Volga-Urals region, the so-called "Second Baku." The chief centers of oil refining in the Transcaucasus are Batumi and Baku. Among the other minerals exploited in the region are manganese in the Chiatura area of

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Georgia, coal at Tkvarcheli and Tkibuli in Georgia, iron ore at Dashkesan in Azerbaydzhan, and copper at Alaverdi and Kafan in Armenia. Copper is smelted and refined at the Alaverdi copper works, and heavy industry is being developed in the Tbilisi area. In Rustavi, just south of Tbilisi, the Transcaucasian Metallurgical Plant, which includes blast furnaces, open-hearth furnaces, and rolling mills, uses the iron from Dashkesan and Georgian coal. One of the largest ferro-alloy works in the USSR is located at Zestafoni. It produces an estimated 15 to 20 percent of the total Soviet output. The major power sources in the Region are (1) the group of thermal plants between Baku and Sumgait, (2) the hydroelectric plants of the Sevan-Razdan Cascade north of Yerevan, and (3) the Mingechaur hydroelectric plant.

The agricultural pattern within the Transcaucasus is extremely diverse, reflecting the wide range in terrain and climatic features of the region. About a fourth of the territory of the region is under cultivation, the most extensive cultivated areas being located in the Rion Valley and in the irrigated portions of the Kurra Lowland. Tea plantations and citrus groves predominate in the middle Rion Lowland and in much of the Black Sea coastal area. Where the lower slopes of the mountains come near the Black Sea, however, tobacco and grapes are raised in addition to tea. Extensive vineyards are also found northwest of Tbilisi and southwest of Yerevan and provide the basis for a winemaking and distilling industry. On the lower slopes of the mountains throughout the region, cereals are grown for local consumption. Cotton, fruits, vegetables, and rice are raised in the irrigated parts of the

Kura and Araks Valleys. Transcaucasia is the second most important cotton growing region within the Soviet Union. One-third of the Transcaucasus Region is classified as pasture or grass land. The dry, unirrigated steppes of the lowlands are used for pasture in winter and the alpine meadows in summer. Sheep and cattle are the principal types of livestock.

The high and rugged terrain that comprises much of Transcaucasia directly affects the mode and direction of transportation. The rivers are either too swift or otherwise unsuited for use as inland waterways. The rail system consists of a main line crossing the isthmus from east to west through the lowlands. A large southern loop extends from Baku southwest to the boundary of the USSR, which it follows to Leninakan, where it turns north again to join the main line at Tbilisi. Numerous branch lines also extend short distances north and south of the main line. Leninakan and Dzhul'fa are connecting points for transborder rail traffic into Turkey and Iran, respectively. The only rail lines extending northward to the rest of the Soviet Union follow the coasts of the Black and Caspian Seas; no lines cross the Caucasus Range. The main roads of the region have the same general orientation as the rail lines, but two major roads cross the middle Caucasus. The Georgian Military Highway connects Tbilisi with Ordzhonikidze, and the other road connects Kutaisi with Alagir. Both go through passes that are subject to blocking by snow during the winter. In addition, roads play an indispensable role in meeting transportation needs in areas that are inaccessible to rail transport. Roads are generally poor, particularly from midwinter through early summer.

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